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ABSTRACT

A study measured a community's attitudes towards its school district as well as its attitudes towards the subject matter included in consumer and homemaking education. In addition, the study assessed whether alienation was a possible cause for the attitudes toward the schools and consumer and homemaking education. Using a structured questionnaire consisting of a personal data form, the Middleton Alienation Scale, and project-developed instruments to measure level of school district concern and attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education, a researcher collected information from a stratified random sample of 258 community members of five school districts in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Analysis of the completed questionnaires revealed a highly positive correlation between alienation and community attitudes towards the schools. However, no substantial correlation was found for alienation and attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education. In addition, the attitudes of community members with children in school were not substantially different from those of community members who do not have children in the schools. Alienation from society--a factor found to be closely tied to attitude toward the schools and consumer and homemaking education--was linked to age, income, and educational level. (MN)

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Attitudes of Community Members Toward the Schools and Consumer and Homemaking Education

By Cathleen T. Love

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The purpose of this study was to measure a community's attitudes toward the school district in which they reside and to determine what the community's attitudes were toward the subject matter included in consumer and homemaking education. In addition, it endeavored to determine if alienation was a possible cause for the attitudes toward the schools and consumer and homemaking education.

The review of the literature implied that more two-way communication between the community and the schools would cause the schools to become more effective. Data on the concerns of community members would lead to a better understanding of the community. An instrument to provide a systematic inquiry into the concerns of the community would be helpful to educators seeking data about community attitudes toward the schools.

Consumer and homemaking education deals with the complexities of the home. Because the home is a sensitive area for home economists to approach, a factual knowledge of the community and its attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education is much needed. Within the present conditions of rapid social change it is difficult for teachers to assess the attitudes of the community but decisions about curriculum must consider the community environment. An insturment to measure community attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education would assist home economists in these decisions.

Selection of the Sample

The population for this study was community members of five school districts in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Franklin County is located

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in south-central Pennsylvania along the Maryland border. This county was chosen because the school districts included rural as well as urban populations.

In selecting a sample conflicting advice was provided by many sampling experts. Suggestions were made to use the addresses of licensed drivers, registered voters, parents of students in the schools, the telephone directory and others. Because a sample of the general population of the community was desired, all the recommendations had limitations which had to be considered. The telephone company estimated that 97% of the households in the United States have telephones. Of those 97% approximately 4% are unlisted. A large percentage of the unlisted telephone users are within or around large cities like Philadelphia or Pittsburgh. It was concluded that in Franklin County the telephone directory gave the most representative sample of the general population for the five school districts.

A stratified random sample was used for this study. The population for each school district in Franklin County was estimated using the latest available census data. By using a sample size of 1,000 it was estimated that approximately 300 questionnaires would be returned from this general population.

To draw the stratified random sample, the telephone exchange numbers which represent each school district were identified. Then, using a random numbers table, the phone exchanges were counted until the desired strata size for each school district was drawn.

Selection of the Instruments

The research design used was a survey-type design. Data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire. The instruments used included a personal data form, Middleton Allienation Scale, Community Estimate of School District Concern developed by this researcher from Ray's Studert Estimate of Teacher Concern, and Attitudes Toward Consumer and Homemaking Education

developed by this researcher.

The personal data form was used to collect demographic data, information cn community members who are in some capacity involved in the schools, activities in the community which the respondents participated and the school district in which the respondent lived.

The Middleton Alienation Scale contained a total of five items in a Likert-type scale to measure the degree of alienation. The five items represented the five components of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self estrangement. The reliability for the total sample was computed to be .723.

The Community Estimate of School District Concern was developed by changing the wording of Ray's Student Estimate of Teacher Concern to place the focus on the community's perception of how concerned the school district personnel are about the community. A total of 23 items were used after the results of pilot-testing were considered. The Community Estimate of School District Concern is a Likert-type scale. The Alpha Coefficient of Reliability was 0.919.

The Attitudes Toward Consumer and Homemaking Education instrument was designed to assess the attitudes of respondents toward the subject matter content of consumer and homemaking education. Each subject matter area, as well as the underlying concepts of values, human development and management, was considered in the development of the items. After pilot-testing, twelve items were used in this Likert-type instrument. The reliability for the Attitudes Toward Consumer and Homemaking Education was 0.856.

Description of the Sample

Each subject was mailed a questionnaire. A total of 283 persons or 28.5% responded to the survey with 258 of the returns or 25.5% being usable. The respondents who answered the original request for participation numbered

185 while the other 98 respondents answered after a follow-up postcard was mailed.

The sample for this study was somewhat unique to the general population of Pennsylvania or the United States. Seventy-one and one-tenth (71.1) percent of the sample population were male. This is a disproportionate amount of men in relation to the general population. It is also a high response rate from men for studies of this kind. The use of the telephone directory as the source of names for the sample resulted in the vast majority of questionnaires being addressed to men: phone directories historically list the telephone number of the household in the male's name. A serendiptous finding was that if the male in the household is the respondent needed, then the survey envelope should be addressed to the male rather than the household.

Another unique characteristic of this sample is that 83.9 percent of the respondents owned their own home. The implication of this for the schools is that these are the people who are supporting the schools through real estate taxes. If the people paying for the schools do not feel positively about them, they might find ways to avoid supporting them.

The education level for this sample also appears to be higher than the norm for the general population. Forty-six and one-tenth percent of the respondents had some college education, and 48.2% were high school graduates. 98% of the sample was white.

The age and income levels for the sample appear to be normally distributed when compared to the national population.

The uniqueness of the population is pointed out to support one of the basic premises on which this study was based. Studies conducted in one area of the state or country are not necessarily generalizable to other areas. School districts must investigate and consider the attitudes and concerns of the community in which they serve.

(Transparency #1)

The first two hypotheses of this study examined the influence of alienation on attitudes toward the schools and attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education. Correlation Coefficients were calculated to determine if a significant inverse relationship existed between alienation and the community's attitudes toward the school and alienation and consumer and homemaking education. In the analysis of the total sample a highly significant positive correlation was found to exist between alienation and community attitudes toward the schools. Community members who were less alienated did have statistically significant more positive attitudes toward the schools, and those who felt alienated from society had negative attitudes toward the schools.

No significant correlation was found for alienation and attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education.

(Transparency #2)

The last two hypothesis examined the difference in attitudes of community members with children in school and community members who do not have children in the schools. T-tests were performed to test these hypotheses. No significant difference was found in attitudes toward the school district or in attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education. Although the attitudes toward schools of respondents with children and respondents without children were found to be significantly different as originally hypothesized, there is an important implication in their sameness. Schools must pay as much attention to the concerns of childless adults as they do to adults with children. The fact that many of these adults returned the questionnaire showed their interest in the schools. This should indicate to the schools that everyone in the district has concerns about the future of the community.

Additional Findings

Respondents found to have a low degree of alienation were more involved

with the schools and the community. Respondents found to be alienated tended toward little or no involvement with the schools and the community. The correlation between these scales also showed that respondents who were involved with the schools were also involved with the community.

The respondents involvement with the schools and community was also found to correlate with their degree of education. The degree of involvement with the schools and community was reported to be low for the respondents with less education and high for the respondents with more education. Respondents with high income levels were found to have a greater involvement with the community than respondents with low incomes.

Alienation from society was found to be an influence on attitudes toward the schools. If community members felt alienated from society, they also felt alienated from the schools. Correlations with alienation were also found to exist between age, income level and education level.

(Transparency #3)

This transparency shows the alienation scores according to the age level. The higher the score the less alienated the respondent. The younger respondents show a low degree of alienation while the elderly show a high degree. The elderly are soon to be a much larger proportion of the population and schools will need their support. Schools need to increase efforts to involve the elderly.

(Transparency #4)

Alienation by income level develops a definite decreasing pattern as the income increases. This transparency shows the high degree of alienation cf those with low incomes and the low degree of alienation as the income increases. The schools should remember, however, that their source of support is from the general population, not just those in high socioeconomic levels. Efforts must be made to meet the need of those with a low socio-economic status as well as those with a high status.

(Transparency #5)

Alienation by education level also shows a decreasing pattern as the education increases. This transparency shows the high degree of alienation of those with less than a high school education and the low degree of alienation of those with advanced education. Again because the schools must serve the entire population these respondents concerns must be considered in school issues.

(Handout)

The Attitudes Toward Consumer and Homemaking Education was the only instrument in the study which clearly showed a positive response. The highest mean scores for items on the scale were for two important concepts. Item #12 suggested that students should be taught in school how values affect their decisions. Considering the uproar which is often connected with any mention of values being taught in the schools, this was a counterpoint to that uproar. It implies, perhaps, that those speaking the loudest against values education are not necessarily the majority.

The other item, item #1, which received the highest positive response was what could be considered the sum of what consumer and homemaking education is supposed to accomplish. This item stated that students should be taught in school the skills necessary to be an adult family member. The subjects in this sample have very positive attitudes toward the schools teaching those adult skills.

Particular subject matter areas of consumer and homemaking education were supported by certain segments of the population. Respondents with children in school or with children at home have acknowledged human development as an important concept to be taught in school. Respondents with more education gave priority to the subject matter consumer education and resource management. Foods and nutrition as part of the curriculum was expressed by respondents with high household incomes to be an important subject matter

which should be taught in the schools. The low-income households who probably need guidelines for healthy eating on the income they do receive fail to recognize foods and nutrition courses as a resource for obtaining those guidelines.

An important result of this study could be the production of a reliable instrument used to examine the attitudes of community members toward the schools. As stated earlier, generalizing from other studies does not help individual school districts. Each school must examine their own audience.

The Attitudes Toward Consumer and Homemaking Education instruments used in this sample gives home economists evidence that the public does support consumer and homemaking education as part of the schools' curriculum. Again, the uniqueness of each school district requires an individual examination. The Attitudes Toward Consumer and Homemaking Education instrument could be used and/or modified for this purpose. Home economics teachers could obtain an idea of what community members would acknowledge as important subject matter areas to teach and which would be found objectionable. It would also aid in convincing administrators and legislators of the need to include all consumer and homemaking education subject matter in the home economics curriculum.

HYPOTHESIS I

There will be an inverse relationship between attitudes toward the school district and alienation.

HYPOTHESIS II

There will be an inverse relationship between attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education and alienation.

HYPOTHESIS III

Community members with children in the schools have more positive attitudes toward the school district than community members who do not have children in the schools.

HYPOTHESIS IV

Community members with children in the schools have more positive attitudes toward consumer and homemaking education than community members who do not have children in the schools.

ALIENATION BY AGE

18 - 25	17.14
26 - 35	18.29
36 - 45	17.02
46 - 55	17.90
56 - 65	16.63
OVER 65	15.03

ALIENATION BY INCOME LEVEL

LESS THAN $10,000	14.88
$10,000 TO $20,000	16.85
$20,000 TO $30,000	17.67
$30,000 TO $40,000	17.97
$40,000 TO $50,000	18.40
MORE THAN $50,000	21.60

ALIENATION BY EDUCATION LEVEL

LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL	14.76
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	16.93
SOME COLLEGE	17.62
COLLEGE GRADUATE	18.27
GRADUATE SCHOOL	19.22

(HANDOUT)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD CONSUMER AND HOMEMAKING EDUCATION
(ATCHE)

		Mean	Standard Deviation	Point Biserial
1.	I feel our schools should prepare students for skills necessary to be an adult family member.	4.18	0.807	0.5010
2.	I feel that choosing a place to live which is best for the needs of the family is important enough to be taught in the schools.	3.69	0.964	0.5099
3.	I feel our teachers should help students to budget food money for a family.	3.32	1.054	0.3784
4.	Students in our school district should be shown by teachers the ways that a family can influence how a person feels about him or her self.	3.83	0.855	0.5655
5.	Our teachers should explain that how a person dresses tells other people something about how that person feels that day.	3.27	1.139	0.3893
6.	Our students do not need to learn what those who are sick should eat.	3.72	0.932	0.4070
7.	I feel that it is important that students be taught to know themselves.	4.15	0.673	0.5142
8.	Our teachers should help students to be better consumers.	4.08	0.795	0.5904
9.	I feel students should learn in school how to care for an infant and young children.	3.58	0.979	0.5754
10.	House repairs should be taught in our schools	3.69	0.919	0.5593
11.	Our teachers should help students to manage their money.	3.47	1.076	0.4563
12.	Our students should be taught in school how values affect their decisions.	4.18	0.690	0.5698

Scoring Procedure: SA was scored as one; A was scored as two; U was scored as three; D was scored as four; and SD was scored as five. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 were reversed.

The possible range for the total instrument was 12-60.

Mean - 45.185
Standard Deviation - 6.853
Standard Error of Measurement - 2.600
Reliability - 0.856
Range - 23-60